**USDA Plans to Implement Animal Traceability Program
For Animals Moving Interstate**
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USDA is conducting a series of public meetings in preparation to drafting regulations to implement what is being referred to as a new, flexible framework for animal disease traceability. The system would initially only apply to animals involved in interstate commerce. The objective of this program is to try to reduce animal illnesses and deaths by making it easier for officials to trace diseases to a particular group of animals, location and time. According to a USDA news release of August 6, 2010, "Under this new direction, states and tribal nations must establish the ability to traceback to their state of origin, animals moving interstate." USDA plans to publish a draft of the animal disease traceability rules this fall with a 90 day open comment period to follow. Interested parties are strongly urged to review these draft rules after they are published and provide comments to USDA. The regulations are expected to be implemented in 2013.

USDA announced plans to implement this new interstate animal disease traceability program early this year after original plans to implement a National Animal Identification System (NAIS) were cancelled. The initial NAIS system was created in 2004 after the discovery in late 2003 of a cow infected with mad cow disease. The objective of this initial NAIS was to provide traceback to the ranch of origin within 48 hours of a disease being discovered. USDA spent about $120 million in an attempt to set up a national animal identification system but gave up on the effort after overwhelming opposition to the program, primarily by farmers and ranchers. Livestock owners complained the cost was too high, that it was too intrusive and involved too much bureaucratic red tape. A voluntary animal identification program was established, but according to USDA, a voluntary system has not worked. USDA estimates that only about 28 percent of the nation's adult cattle had any form of official identification that would allow them to be tracked.

According to USDA, this new animal disease traceability system would initially only apply to

animals moved in interstate commerce, be administered by the states and tribal nations to provide more flexibility, encourage the use of lower-cost technology, and be implemented transparently through federal regulations and the full rulemaking process.

USDA claims that traceability is the key to protecting animal health and marketability. Animal disease traceability does not prevent disease, but knowing where diseased and at-risk animals are is indispensable during an emergency response and for ongoing disease programs.

All livestock, including, cattle, sheep, goats, swine, poultry, etc. involved in interstate commerce will be subject to these new rules. Animals not moved out of state, as well as small producers who raise animals to feed themselves, their families, and their neighbors, are not a part of the framework's scope and focus.

While similar to the original NAIS, this new program is distinctly different as it only applies to animals moving interstate. Basic disease traceability standards will be established, but the framework for the program ultimately will be led and administered by the States and Tribal Nations, with Federal support. Each State and Tribal Nation will be able to determine the specific approaches and solutions it will use to meet basic animal disease traceability performance measures based on the needs of their local producers.

Specific implementing details will probably not be available until after the draft implementing rules are published. The first handler, such as an order buyer, etc. who plans to ship the livestock interstate will be required to tag the livestock.

According to an APHIS Factsheet,
(http://www.aphis.usda.gov/publications/animal_health/content/printable_version/faq_traceability.pdf),
".... The details of the new system will be developed in a transparent and collaborative process. USDA will maintain a list of official identification devices, which can be updated or expanded based on the needs of the States and Tribal Nations. There are many official identification options available, such as branding, metal tags, RFID, just to name a few...." "....Under the new framework, the States and Tribal Nations will hold animal disease traceability information. USDA will stand ready to assist States and Tribal Nations as requested...."